



# **Telecentre Leaders' Forum - Africa**

## **Centre Songhaï - Porto Novo, Benin**

### **November 28 – December 2, 2006**

## **Final report**

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**telecentre.org**  
*a collaborative social investment program of:*



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
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## ***Executive Summary***

telecentre.org in collaboration with Centre Songhaï, Microsoft, the OKN, SDC and UNESCO organized the first Pan African Telecentre Leader's Forum (TLF) that took place from November 28 - December 2, 2006 at Centre Songhaï, in Porto Novo, Benin. The TLF brought together over 80 participants – from 25 African countries and many other corners of the world– to think about the issues they face, learn new skills, share their experiences and best practices, and plan joint activities for common solutions.

The TLF-Africa was a participant-driven event, with an open approach aimed at fully engaging participants in the discussions, facilitation, and documentation. The objectives of the forum were to:

1. Develop a spirit of networking, learning and collaboration within the African telecentre movement.
2. Provide leaders of telecentres and other Community ICT Centres a chance to gain practical skills and learn about new services that can be used in their own networks and telecentres.
3. Search for common solutions to challenges faced by African Community ICT Centres such as sustainability, content, services, connectivity and impact.
4. Encourage the development of concrete collaborative activities that offer solutions to these challenges.
5. Improve awareness of large-scale telecentre programs working in Africa, especially telecentre.org, UNESCO CMC and Microsoft Unlimited Potential.

The forum was preceded by two weeks of online discussion that offered participants an opportunity to shape the agenda and know each other. A select group of telecentre leaders and social investors constituted an "Advisory Circle" which provided background support to the planning activities that started more than two months before the event.

In Benin, the forum started with one-day facilitator's training. The training gave pre-selected group of ten telecentre leaders skills in managing events using participatory open space techniques. Trainees learned about setting agenda, managing discussion in an inclusive manner and giving attendees a voice to effectively share experiences, learn and ask questions. These participants were very useful during the event as co-facilitators and translators. The main forum that started the next day used the same participatory approach. With over eighty participants from across Africa, the forum used a combination of techniques including open circle, spectrogram (where participants to weigh on issues along a spectrum of opinion); small group discussions; speed-geeks (short presentations); peer assists (focused question and answer); skill share (skills training) and project planning sprints

French and English were the main languages of the forum. This was made possible by a professional simultaneous translation team with assistance of a group of bi-lingual telecentre leaders and practitioners. Participants had the freedom to use any language of choice in small group work depending on the language distribution in the group or make use of translation services by a professional or participant translator.

## **Key outcomes**

There were many outcomes from the forum: new relationships and partnerships; increased level of skill and understanding amongst telecentre on important issues; sharing of innovative telecentre and network management ideas that participants could take home. Also, the Forum produced a number of concrete ideas that participants offered to shape up after the event:

### **Social Enterprise: making telecentres socially and economically viable**

This would involve establishment of a working group to champion the idea of social enterprise in telecentres forward across Africa with the purpose of creating a more sustainable telecentre movement. The top-level outcome will be creation of a Telecentre Support Institute to provide training and support on business planning and related issues.

### **Wireless Connectivity: share your internet access**

The main objective is to identify innovative connectivity solutions and ways to make community information centres more efficient with limited connectivity by sharing their bandwidth with community through wireless networks. This will also include building a community of practice to share the skills, knowledge and experiences on how to operate telecentres into small ISP. The project would build on the experiences of FADECO (Tanzania).

### **Content Network: our voices, our internet**

This project would involve setting up a website with a photographic gallery of local images and history as a concrete way to increase the value of local knowledge. Tapping on the expertise present at the forum, a list was created as the basis for the creation of a 'Pan African Content Network' of experts who would be able to share their experiences on the various aspects of content production, adaptation and distribution for local use. It was agreed to create a working group to address the issues of content of telecentres.

### **Sustainability: keeping our telecentres running**

This would establish a regional telecentre learning network to share lessons and best practices and lend support to one another feeding into small national telecentre networks. Create also national or smaller networks. Based on the experiences and discussions of telecentre leaders, develop a manual/guide on how to set up and manage sustainable telecentres.

### **Networking African telecentres: "what we can do together!"**

This activities would aim at continuing to promote networking amongst national networks across Africa with the purpose of strengthening the channels for knowledge sharing and increasing impact of telecentre work.

## **Conclusions**

The forum rallied telecentre practitioners across Africa in a true Pan-African fashion, created opportunities for networking, helped to create new relationship or strengthened those that existed already and yet provided an opportunity to reflect on on-going efforts to strengthen the relevancy of telecentres to community development. It also helped traditional and new social investors in the telecentre community to reconnect to the achievements, passion and issues with practitioners.

Indeed participants' evaluation process conducted at the end forum confirmed that the event was very strong on content, relevancy to telecentre issues, creative in methodology and delivery approach and helped to strengthen the telecentre movement in Africa. On the part of telecentre.org and other social investors, there were a lot of lessons and new relationships developed to facilitate future programming.

Participants are expected to continue discussions that started in Benin online to shape the ideas into concrete collaborative projects. This will also involve getting other telecentre practitioners and social investors to engage. telecentre.org will continue to mentor and support such discussions. While telecentre.org is does not guarantee to make social investments in each of the projects that will emerge from this process, efforts will be made to connect these with on-going programs or interest other social investors in the telecentre community.

## Background

*... we have enough entrepreneurs in the African continent that can make telecentres sustainable ... and we can tap into that passion and creativity to reap the rewards.*  
**-Hilton Theunissen – South African**

Two heads *think* better than one, to change the old saying. Imagine what over eighty heads can do when they come together to think of a better future for telecentres across Africa! Imagine the possibilities! During the Africa Telecentre Leaders' Forum 2006, telecentre practitioners, network leaders, researchers and representatives from the international development community gathered at Centre Songhaï to do just that. telecentre.org in collaboration with Centre Songhaï, Microsoft, the OKN, SDC and UNESCO organized the first Pan African Telecentre Leader's Forum (TLF) that took place from November 28 - December 2, 2006 at Centre Songhaï, in Porto Novo, Benin. The TLF brought together over 80 participants –covering 25 African countries and many other corners of the world– to think about the issues they face, share their experiences and best practices, and plan joint activities for common solutions.

This document chronicles the event and presents highlights of key outcomes including: new initiatives and partnerships that become channels for knowledge and skills sharing, increased support, and the basis for an enduring network of African telecentres.

## Objectives

The objectives of the forum were as follows:

1. Develop a spirit of networking, learning and collaboration within the African telecentre movement.
2. Provide leaders of telecentres and other Community ICT Centres a chance to gain practical skills and learn about new services that can be used in their own networks and telecentres.
3. Search for common solutions to challenges faced by African Community ICT Centres such as sustainability, content, services, connectivity and impact.
4. Encourage the development of concrete collaborative activities that offer solutions to these challenges.
5. Improve awareness of large-scale telecentre programs working in Africa, especially telecentre.org, UNESCO CMC and Microsoft Unlimited Potential.

## The Process

Following a participatory model to enable participants to shape the forum's program of work, the TLF at Benin included series of techniques and approaches to promote inclusion, collaboration, interactive learning and participation at every stage of the event. To set the agenda for instance, a mailing list was created where members of the advisory circle and participants provided input and discussed issues and topics for the forum. While topics and issues were identified ahead of the event and were included in the forum discussions, the agenda remained open and fluid enabling participants' ownership of the process.

The TLF-Africa was set to be a participant-designed event, with an open approach aimed at fully engaging participants in the discussions, facilitation, and documentation. In Benin, Allen Gunn (aka Gunner), the facilitator provided a one-day training a select group of telecentre leaders who then used participatory techniques to animate participants in plenary presentations and small group work discussions.

Some of the techniques used during the TLF include: open circle (participants sit in an open circle during plenary time); Spectrogram (an exercise to get participants to weigh on issues along a spectrum of opinion); small group discussions; speed-geeks (mini presentation stations visited by participants); Peer Assists (a problem solving technique where peers work together); skill shares (mini training, hands-on sessions); market place of ideas (innovative format to present projects); project planning sprints (a technique used to capitalize on expertise to create a product/work on a project over a short period of time); etc.

The linguistic profiles of participants included English and French and measures were put in place to ensure fluid communications across languages. We had the assistance of a professional translation team for plenary discussions. For small-group discussions, participants grouped around a common language and reports back to the entire group were simultaneously translated.

### **The venue**

The TLF was hosted by Centre Songhai which is a "center for training, for production, research and development of sustainable agricultural practices" using holistic ecological and social approaches for the benefit of African youth. Participants experienced and witness a concrete example of the integration of telecentre work into social, economic and agricultural initiatives.

Centre Songhai, is one of the leading, African founded and run organizations.

The following pages are part of an open documenting process. The summaries of discussions, project ideas, and more information from the TLF presented here are an iteration of the evolving and continuing conversations among the members of the African and wider telecentre movement. The focus is placed on the concrete ideas that emerged from the forum.

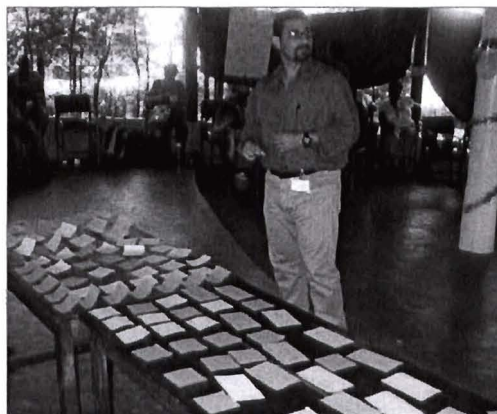
### **By the end of the week I hope to:**

- learn about mechanisms to make telecentres sustainable and reconcile that social and economic bottom line
- learn how to protect locally produced content, including the youth - use multimedia to popularize science
- improve the functioning of telecentres by lobbying the government policy to reduce cost of infrastructure and equipment
- get a functioning network for content sharing and support in Africa
- form a group to collaborate on networking in fight against HIV AIDS
- network across the regions - Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Pacific - "ACP" Internet radio portal
- develop synergies and harmonization of telecentres and CMCs
- develop content model to use in different countries
- learn about best management practices and models to set up telecentres
- find appropriate solutions for connectivity problems
- learn how to transform political into social information in a post-conflict setting
- build a stronger networking for West African telecentres to ensure flow of information and knowledge
- find a balance between social and financial orientation of telecentres
- collectively create a telecentre community in South Africa

## ***Open spaces, open ideas: Recreating the telecentre world in Africa***

Participants started the forum with a multitude of issues related doing telecentre work. During the initial brainstorm, participants were asked to write down their ideas on post-it notes. This provided a visual feel of the breadth of issues, challenges, and topics for the forum. Such issues included the following:

- Social development – poverty reduction
- Advocacy for telecentre friendly policy
- Content (production, adaptation, exchange, distribution, tools, people)
- Gender inclusion and sensitivity
- Services (types, scales - for, with and by telecentres)
- Networking (regional, inter-regions, national, support services)
- Connectivity (strategies for solutions, alternatives)
- State/government (roles, lobbying, policy)
- Community and telecentres (benefit, engagement, integration)
- Capacity building (management, technical, networking, telecentre academy)
- Needs assessment in community (responsive, relevant, support)
- Sustainability (models, strategies, business plans, social enterprise)



These issues were further discussed and boiled down into themes that provided the basis for the small group discussions, speed-geeks, peer assists and for project planning sprints. In all cases, discussions were focused on sharing knowledge and experiences and emerge with a number of concrete projects relevant to the issues.

Working around the themes, self-selected discussion leaders facilitated the conversations, sometimes breaking into sub-groups to address other issues as they emerged. As ideas grew nuanced, new groups emerged and merged based on shared goals and objectives. Participants were extremely motivated and owned the process as well as outcomes. Discussions progressed to refine topics, gathering feedback as participants were invited to dream of joint projects and initiatives that would take their ideas to a more concrete level and devise solutions to their problems and issues.

Once topics had taken more defined shape, leaders presented them to the entire group in a session called: *Market place of ideas*. This session was designed to give all participants the opportunity of learning about other projects, ask questions and provide feedback contributing to the further refinement of the projects. It was also the time to recruit new people who might help to concretise the project ideas. The following are some of the key concrete project ideas and associated themes that TLF participants worked on during the forum:

- Networking telecentres (imagine what we can do together)
- Social Enterprise (innovating the social and the economic)
- Wireless Connectivity (become an ISP – if local regulations allow)
- Sustainability (indicators of a viable/sustainable telecentre)
- Content Network (producing, adapting, valorizing & distributing content)



## ***Social Enterprise: making telecentres socially and economically viable***

Many participants expressed an interest in finding innovative models to sustain the telecentres beyond "pilots". They exhaustively considered the opportunity of using the "social enterprise" approach that offers the twin benefit of achieving their original social mission and while generating revenue that can help them sustain telecentre activities.

Participants therefore reviewed the principals underlying Social Enterprise, which is a model that dates back many decades within the non-profit sector and cooperatives, which merge social mission and cost-recovery models of operations. There is already a younger generation in Africa pushing these ideas and creating alternatives for income generation and sustainability for themselves based on the lessons of the non-profit and cooperative movement.

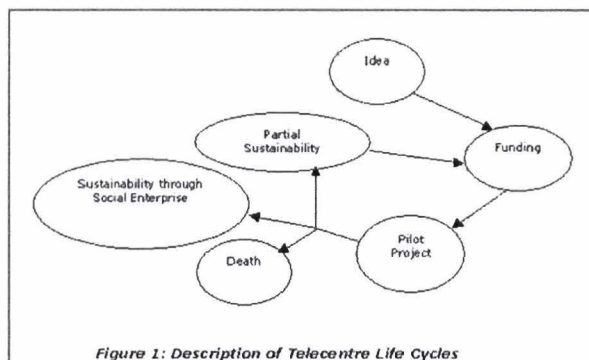


Figure 1: Description of Telecentre Life Cycles

### **Project idea**

Leaders: 'Gbenga Sesan (Nigeria), Hilton Theunissen (South Africa) and Sherif Tokali (Egypt)

Timeline: Dec 2006- March 2007

This would involve establishment of a working group to move the idea of social enterprise forward across Africa with the purpose of creating a more sustainable telecentre movement. The top-level outcome will be creation of a Telecentre Support Institute to provide training and support on business planning and related issues.

### **Identified priorities activities**

During discussion of this project idea, the following were identified as priority activities:

- Draft a concept paper for consultations and as the basis for a feasibility study and resource mobilisation
- Formation of Steering Committee/Board
- Develop a business plan built in the principle of preservation of values and mission of telecentres and identify business opportunities to exchange value added products to recover costs, looking into ecommerce, and like activities
- Provide advice and training to telecentres that want to explore the social enterprise models while using expertise, competencies existing in the telecentre community and engage other partners
- Roll out pilot project (develop model, select pilot countries, monitoring/evaluation, documentation)

### **Anticipated challenges**

- Consolidating a strong thinking of self-reliance with telecentre community
- Dispelling misconceptions about relationship between business and social mission
- Scaling up given the limited coverage of telecentres

### **Associated discussions**

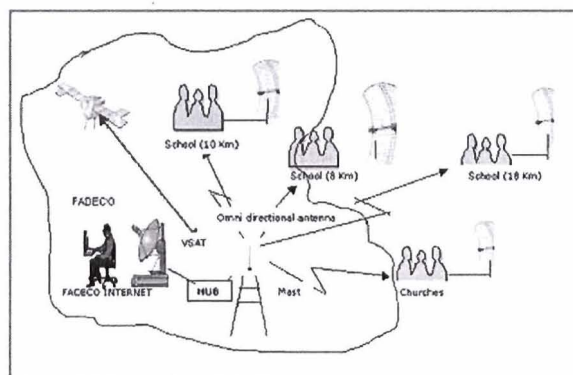
- Collaborative curriculum development. Facilitated by Aminata Maiga Fofana – Afriklinks, Mali

- The role of governments (local, national) to support telecentres. Facilitated by Jocelyne Josiah – UNESCO, India
- The Telecentre Support Institute – Facilitated by 'Gbenga Sesan – Lagos Digital Village, Nigeria & Hilton Theunissen – tuXlab, South Africa
- Content for all by all. Facilitated by Rokia Ba – UNESCO, Mali; Jocelyne Josiah – UNESCO, India; & Peter Cranston – UK
- Sustainability of telecentres in Africa. Mohamed Ag Acharom – Afriklinks, Mali
- Harsha is conducting a study on the Telecentre Social Enterprise and this will support the social enterprise initiatives that would emerge within the telecentre family, including those coming out of the TLF Africa.
- Community Engagement: lessons from successful and failed projects. Facilitated by Esther Nasikye – UgaBYTES Initiative, Uganda.

## Wireless Connectivity: share your internet access

*"... where the conditions are conducive, where the regulatory framework is ok... why don't you share your bandwidth with others. Now, we have the expertise, we have the experience, we are willing to share with you, so you can do that!" – Joseph Sekiku – Tanzania*

Participants noted the numerous challenges telecentres face with connectivity. Throughout Africa, connectivity costs are prohibitively high, and not necessarily reliable. Access is limited and extremely regulated, making it a luxury item for the majority of the population and isolating many areas. "Access should not be the privilege of a few, if some of you have connectivity, you should be able to share it with others, like schools, hospitals and NGOs", passionately argued Joseph Sekiku as he presented his idea of creating publicly accessible wireless points in every community and city in Africa.



Participants were thrilled with the idea that is possible to open and share their access to the internet with the members of the community and being part of the solution to ensure the issue of affordable and sustainable access. Eager to learn how to do it, they participated in demo sessions, and group discussions exploring possible gains, challenges and obstacles. The concept of wireless Africa had so much resonance with participants so much that a concept paper and working group were formed during the forum to initiate activities.

### Project idea

Leader(s): Joseph Sekiku – FADECO, Tanzania

The main objective is to identify innovative connectivity solutions and ways to make community information centres more efficient with limited connectivity by sharing their bandwidth with community through wireless networks. This will also include building a community of practice to share the skills, knowledge and experiences on how to operate telecentres into small ISP. The project would build on the experiences of FADECO (Tanzania).

### Identified priorities activities

During discussion of this project idea, the following were identified as priority activities:

- Investigate the regulatory and policy frameworks in each targeted project country to assess if the conditions are favourable to set up small ISP initiatives
- Develop or adapt available training materials on deploying wireless networks using local bandwidth.
- Deliver training and build capacity of trainers at country level leaders and participating telecentres.
- Establish demo wireless pilot projects in the following countries: Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo Brazzaville and Mozambique, if the conditions allow
- Support participating telecentres to widen the range of services they offer to include: local dial-up to other telecentres; local web hosting, training on ICTs, etc, using their own connectivity access (minimum requirement from 64kb to VSAT)
- Lobby governments and engage more partners
- Document experiences and use the lessons to replicate in other places

### Anticipated challenges

- Regulatory framework in some countries may restrict the possibility of sharing bandwidth outside the premises, limiting the actions of ISPs
- High cost of connectivity (especially in Africa and rural areas in general)

### Associated discussions

- Role of national networks to telecentres work and regional networks. Facilitated by Polly Gaster – CIUEM, Mozambique
- Collaborative curriculum development. Facilitated by Aminata Maiga Fofana – Afriklinks, Mali
- The Telecentre Support Institute – Facilitated by 'Gbenga Sesan – Lagos Digital Village, Nigeria & Hilton Theunissen – tuXlab, South Africa
- Policy Advocacy Group. Facilitated by Joseph Célestin Dzokou PND Programme, Cameroun, Polly Gaster - CIUEM, Mozambique, & Ian Pringle – UNESCO, France
- Community Engagement: lessons from successful and failed projects. Facilitated by Esther Nasikye – UgaBYTES Initiative, Uganda.

### Content Network: our voices, our internet

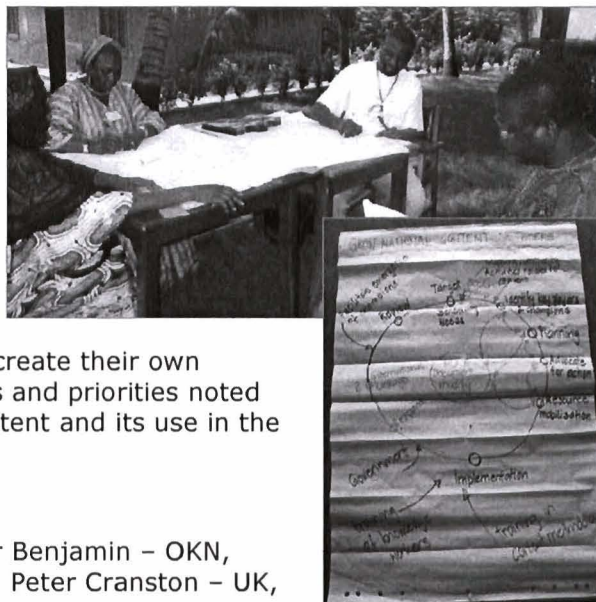
*On écoute que les gens disent, en Afrique, nous avons besoin d'avoir contenu. Ce n'est pas dire qu'il n'y a pas de contenu africain. Ça va dire que . CHECK the VIDEO for her words **Rokia Ba - Mali***

*We have the content in Africa, but we have not been able to upload it to the internet, and therefore we do not have content... **'Gbenga Sesan - Nigeria***

Participants emphasized the importance of content to their work. Therefore a number of themes emerged around the content including: the need to produce content locally; the need to recognize and "valorize" existing local content and knowledge (or *en français : la valorisation du contenu local*) ; the need to "repackage" and adapt (localize) content to respond to local demands; the need of material and financial resources to implement content production/adaptation projects. In spite of the long list of needs, the main point of these discussions was the need to make African content more visible on the internet and



Participants agreed on the importance of content as means to preserve and transmit culture and traditions to youth and future generations, and on the need to create content on local languages. They also saw content as a tool for human development that empowers communities to action and enhances their participation in the information age. They also agreed that they themselves as development organizations are able to create the content for the communities and can enable communities to create their own content to share with others. And the projects and priorities noted below are geared to address the issues of content and its use in the continent.



Leaders: Rokia Ba – UNESCO, Mali, Peter Benjamin – OKN,  
South Africa, Jocelyne Josiah, UNESCO, India, Peter Cranston – UK,  
Timeline: Dec 2006- March 2007

This project would involve setting up a website with a photographic gallery of local images and history as a concrete way to increase the value of local knowledge. Tapping on the expertise present at the forum, a list was created as the basis for the creation of a 'Pan African Content Network' of experts who would be able to share their experiences on the various aspects of content production, adaptation and distribution for local use. It was agreed to create a working group to address the issues of content of telecentres.

During discussion of this project idea, the following were identified as priority activities:

- Gather information on the specific content needs of the communities where they work
- Draft a concept note on how to move forward with the ideas proposed
- Map content available (locally and internationally) and sort according to its relevance to telecentres, and separate by categories of what can be adapted, repackaged, localized
- Learn from previous experiences on creating and distributing content using different media to build an integrated telecentre network (radio, CD, television, newspapers, internet, etc)
- Develop training workshops, courses, seminars to train 'knowledge workers' as key components of telecentres and CMCs and ensure production and distribution of content at all levels everywhere
- Create a content working group and set up mailing lists in multiple languages
- Publish topical guides for instance: "Where there is no agricultural extensionist"
- Develop business opportunities and proposals for funding of various aspects of content production and dissemination by private and public sector partners.

### Anticipated challenges

- Finding the resources (financial & human) to implement content production projects
- Finding a way to engage meaningfully the community, ensuring inclusion at all levels of literacy, reaching people where they are
- Appropriate tools to harness local content and knowledge

### Associated discussions

- Content Creation: Sharing models to engage communities to create and share content on networks using story telling. Facilitated by Martin Karimi ALIN-EA, Kenya & Yaya Sangaré – Coooperative culturelle multimedia Jamana, Mali.
- S'enraciner pour mieux s'ouvrir: local content. Facilitated by Rokia Ba, UNESCO, Mali.
- Developing human resources for local content. Facilitated by Jocelyne Josiah – UNESCO, India
- Role of national networks to telecentres work and regional networks. Facilitated by Polly Gaster – CIUEM, Mozambique
- Collaborative curriculum development. Facilitated by Aminata Maiga Fofana – Afriklinks, Mali
- The Telecentre Support Institute – Facilitated by 'Gbenga Sesan – Lagos Digital Village, Nigeria & Hilton Theunissen – tuXlab, South Africa
- Policy Advocacy Group. Facilitated by Joseph Célestin Dzokou PND Programme, Cameroun, Polly Gaster – CIUEM, Mozambique, & Ian Pringle – UNESCO, France
- Community Engagement: lessons from successful and failed projects. Facilitated by Esther Nasikye – UgaBYTES Initiative, Uganda.

### Sustainability: keeping our telecentres running

*"Au Cameroun, nous venons juste de commencer et nous souhaitons que ce forum nous donne plus d'idées pour parvenir à mettre en place des télécentres viables avec des gestionnaires compétents."* – **Amina Sale – Cameroon**

Participants observed that the benefits of the information age have had a very limited reach in the African continent. Telecentres, with their social mandate, work to bring the benefits of ICT to the human development processes in their communities. However, many successful projects/ideas are short-lived since many telecentres have to rely on the support of the international donor community for their operations. This support is often limited to a pilot phase or a certain number of years. It is becoming increasingly evident that it is necessary to explore innovative ways to ensure continuity of the work that telecentres do, and their own sustainability.



The discussions centred on stakeholders participation, community engagement, training needed for telecentre operations and managers, what it takes to create a sustainable telecentre. Participants also looked at the issue of human capacity and the need to develop technical and professional capacities of telecentre practitioners so they develop and deliver locally relevant services to the communities.

**Project idea:**

Leader(s): Mohamed Ag Acharom – Afriklinks, Mali

Timeline: Dec 2006– March 2007

This would establish a regional telecentre learning network to share lessons and best practices and lend support to one another feeding into small national telecentre networks. Create also national or smaller networks. Based on the experiences and discussions of telecentre leaders, develop a manual/guide on how to set up and manage sustainable telecentres.

**Identified priorities activities**

During discussion of this project idea, the following were identified as priority activities:

- Share experiences and best practices online and offline on effective management of telecentres in major African official languages and create a FAQ database for quick reference
- Strengthen local networks and establish links to national & regional ones
- Explore the possibility of internship placements and staff exchanges
- Capitalize on the French network and their website ([www.africaden.net](http://www.africaden.net)) where they discuss telecentre issues
- Make use of materials and approaches that other partners have already developed (in Arabic, French) and offer them in a common place ([itrainonline.org](http://itrainonline.org))
- Raise awareness among stakeholders in the community (donors, community leaders, CSOs, educational institutions, government sector, service providers, etc) about their roles in keeping a telecentre viable and sustainable
- Periodically assess community needs and the role telecentres can play

**Anticipated challenges**

- Lack of technical and managerial capacities among telecentre managers
- Limited community involvement in telecentre management
- Bringing the stakeholders to the table (donors, community leaders, CSOs, educational institutions, government sector, service providers, etc) and get them to take ownership on telecentre issues

**Associated discussions**

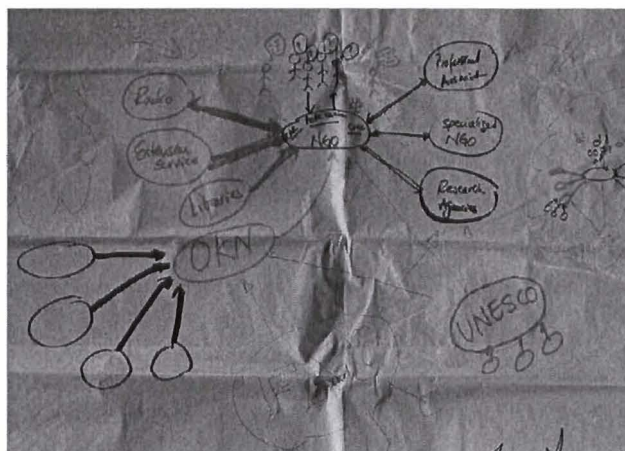
- Role of national networks to telecentres work and regional networks. Facilitated by Polly Gaster – CIUEM, Mozambique
- Collaborative curriculum development. Facilitated by Aminata Maiga Fofana – Afriklinks, Mali
- Social Enterprise and Telecentre Support Institute – Facilitated by 'Gbenga Sesan – Lagos Digital Village, Nigeria & Hilton Theunissen – tuXlab, South Africa
- Policy Advocacy Group. Facilitated by Joseph Célestin Dzokou PND Programme, Cameroun, Polly Gaster – CIUEM, Mozambique, & Ian Pringle – UNESCO, France
- Collaborative curriculum development. Facilitated by Aminata Maiga Fofana – Afriklinks, Mali
- The role of governments (local, national) to support telecentres. Facilitated by Jocelyne Josiah – UNESCO, India
- Content Creation: Sharing models to engage communities to create and share content on networks using story telling. Facilitated by Martin Karimi ALIN-EA, Kenya & Yaya Sangaré – Coooperative culturelle multimedia Jamana, Mali.
- S'enraciner pour mieux s'ouvrir: local content. Facilitated by Rokia Ba, UNESCO, Mali.



- Developing human resources for local content. Facilitated by Jocelyne Josiah – UNESCO, India

## Networking African telecentres: “what we can do together!”

Participants observed that telecentre practitioners face many challenges in their daily operations; they cannot be everywhere and know everything at all times. They work with limited resources (financial, human, and material) and consequently cannot create desired social development impact. They also noted that to meet the needs of a community, a telecentre often requires collaboration with community and other stakeholders in form of management and facilitation skills, new ideas, training, financing or simply moral support.



Participants also mentioned that getting assistance often means retaining the costly services of experts, which they cannot afford. There was general optimism about the possibility of practitioners working together in telecentre networks in sharing knowledge, creating new models of work, creating and sharing content, exchanging staff and expertise, supporting each other, understanding regulations and presenting a united front to negotiate with suppliers.

Discussions of challenges for telecentre networks also included consideration of models, priorities, levels, size, and projects that can be done together. The forum itself offered participants numerous opportunities to learn specific skills during “*skill-share and peer-assist*” sessions.

### Idea

Leaders: Aminata Maiga Fofana (Mali), Ndaula Sulah (Uganda) and Nayer Wanas (Egypt)

This activities would aim at increasing collaboration amongst telecentre national networks across Africa with the purpose of strengthening the channels for knowledge sharing and increasing impact of telecentre work. This network would be built around existing telecentre networks and develop programming relevant to the region.

### Identified priorities activities

During discussion of this project idea, the following were identified as priority activities:

- Develop and maintain a database of all telecentre networks (skills, expertise, knowledge base) in order to network and support growth of more national telecentre networks
- Lead efforts to translate and adapt content into local languages

- Develop and implement capacity building and skill sharing strategies that capitalize on economies of scale and take advantage of collective expertise such as staff exchange across telecentres
- Promote innovation and new ideas and share best practices like negotiating costs of connectivity and licences as a group

### Anticipated challenges

- Networking requires time and resources to cover costs of staff time, meetings (face-to-face), and travel
- In countries where there is no national network, which comes first: regional or national
- Pay per use of services offered by the networks (may or may not work)
- Potential overlap of services offered by network and local telecentre, competing for same markets
- Deciding what are the shared priorities that the network will work on and the models to be used for cost sharing

### Associated Discussions

- Role of national networks to telecentres work and regional networks. Facilitated by Polly Gaster – CIUEM, Mozambique
- Collaborative curriculum development. Facilitated by Aminata Maiga Fofana – Afriklinks, Mali
- The role of governments (local, national) to support telecentres. Facilitated by Jocelyne Josiah – UNESCO, India

### Other conversations

#### What is telecentre.org to you?

The TLF had many aha! moments, moments where participants hit the jackpot of ideas and found the answers they had been looking for. There were also feedback moments, for instance on how telecentre.org programs and organizations its work in Africa since its launch in Tunis. Here are some highlights of that conversation:

*"telecentre.org lets us do what we want because we know want other than telling us what to do. It can provide support for initiatives that already exist at local and national level. In our case, a network of community ICT initiatives was already taking shape and telecentre.org support is crucial to help us take off on a social basis"* - **Polly Gaster – CIUEM - Mozambique**

*"It means functional relationships, collaboration and networks which yield synergies. To people who understand marriage, it is like having direction, dating, courtships and finally marriage"* - **Sulah Ndaula - Uganda**

*"telecentre.org means to me what I experience here right now. Lots of interesting and enthusiastic people who want to do something for their nations, peers and Africa"* - **Veronika Roos – SDC – Switzerland**

*"telecentre.org for me is a means for all Malian telecentres even with different funding partners having an opportunity of uniting to resolve issues and challenges as well as take the opportunities to achieve their sustainability and the development of their community "* - **Aminata M. Fofana – Afriklinks -Mali**



*"Learning, networking and collaboration. For us it is the best investment "* - **Ntutule Tshenye** -  
**Microsoft Sub-Saharan Africa**

## Passions and Expectations

Participants were asked to compare notes on what they loved most about their daily work in their telecentres and what they hoped to take away at the end of the forum. Both the love and hope found overlaps as expressed below.

### What I love the most about my telecentre is that:

- it is one-stop shop
- through the UgaBYTES network, members find and share answers
- it documents its content and local community information in the Web
- it connects to the community through Radio
- it develops appropriate content for users
- it has community participation and involvement to maintain interest amongst users, is a community sharing and learning centre
- it allows me to meet people from the community, provide them with the help and solutions they need, and help someone discover something new
- it contributes to break community's isolation and connect it to the rest of the world, while improving the well-being of rural people
- it provides access to information, translation into the local language when needed
- it increase participation of women in development using ICTs
- it teaches and encourages children, women, and youth to use ICTs

Participants' expectations and aspirations were high and mirrored the passion with which they run and work in telecentres. Experience has showed them that while information (knowledge) alone is not the answer to all problems. Finding the right information, at the right time can enable people to find the appropriate solution. They have seen many eyes light up every time they help someone access the information needed, for instance: the farmer who would make a decision to sell her produce based in the price information retrieved from an internet site or through a phone call to friend in town.

Alongside the satisfaction derived from assisting a client at the telecentre, telecentre managers and leaders face many other issues, such as the heavy dependency on funders' financial support; rapid deterioration of equipment; prohibitive costs of licenses and connectivity; lack of locally appropriate content; isolation; to name a few. Coming together at the TLF, leaders had the opportunity of discussing these and other issues and try to find solutions.

## More issues

In addition to the discussions highlighted above, participants took full advantage of the face-to-face opportunity to touch on many other topics and issues relevant to their daily work. The following list is a sample of some of them:

- Applications and services in telecentres – Heziequiel
- Resources mobilization for telecentres – Sherif
- What to advocate to whom – Ian
- Discussion about the telecentre.org site – Leonce & Esther
- Develop a strategy to participate and strengthen UgaBYTES helpdesk – Sula

- Networking telecentre leaders post TLF – Paul Barera
- Improving access to telecentre services of underserved populations (illiterate) – Mohamed Ag Acharon
- Research on best practices for telecentres – Gbenga S
- Evaluations to empower CMC or telecentres.

Some of the discussions led to participants coming up with ideas of projects in which they could work together and others were simply ideas to work on once they went back to their countries. The evaluation forms revealed some of these issues:

- Strengthen telecentre movement at the country level including working to create national networks of telecentre in one's own country;
- Work on social enterprise; create a Community of practice for grassroots African researchers;
- Content development (using podcast or other tools);
- Networks for sharing of knowledge;
- Telecentre Support Institute;
- Research on telecentre issues;
- Fundraising for telecentres;
- Developing services adapted to people with special needs and disability;
- Reference desk for francophone telecentres;
- Integrating tuXlab into telecentre.org;
- Working on Wireless Africa;
- Work on sustainability issues;
- Business planning;
- Work on the production of the French version of telecentre times;
- Improve functioning of my own telecentre.

### **Speed-Geeks (highlights)**

Note: podcasts for these speakers will be available on the telecentre.org website.

- UNDP ICT4 Development Programme in Egypt – Presenter: Sherif Tokali (link to podcast)
- APC Women Networking Support Program – Gender Evaluation Methodology for telecentre project in Mozambique – Presenter: Silvia Afonso (link to podcast)
- UNESCO – Digital stories – Presenter: Jocelyne Josiah (link to podcast)
- Social impact of ICTs in Egypt – Presenter: Mohammed Fouad (link to podcast)
- World Social Forum 2007 – Presenter: Peter Benjamin (link to podcast)
- ICTs and Traditional Medicine in Senegal – Presenter: Abdoulayé Ndao – (link to postcast)
- UNESCO - Local Content in Action – Presenter: Paul Hector (link to podcast)
- UgaBYTES – Telecentre Reference Helpdesk – Presenter: Ndaula Sula (link to podcast)

### **Conclusions**

Participants' feedback spelled success for the TLF in Benin. However, the success of the event can also be measured by what participants been doing after the forum. The evidence so far is positive. In the intervening time since the TLF, participants have continued to be active in build the project ideas into concrete activities and participating in online communities in French and English.

The online communities in many cases have expanded to include new members and they are the workspaces for discussions, knowledge sharing, and the forging of new joint initiatives. In addition, concept papers have been prepared, meetings have taken place and there is a sense of high vibrancy in the community that embraces many countries of Africa.

In conclusion, the Africa Telecentre Leaders' Forum was a success. Bringing African Telecentre leaders is a very important step toward increasing the effectiveness of their work since they can: tap into new sources of knowledge and expertise found in their peers; join forces for influencing policy and negotiate with service providers for better conditions to operate telecentres; build each others capacities by learning from more experienced network leaders; go beyond the concern of content production to "local content validation and recognition" and localization; finding innovative ways to make socially conscious telecentres into sustainable entities by exploring "enterprising" and business models; collaborating on curriculum development to cover issues of common concern. The possibilities are endless.

For telecentre.org organizing the African TLF was another opportunity to learn and improve in our work. Some of the lessons learned include:

- It was a great opportunity to work directly with partners like Centre Songhai, UNESCO, OKN and our social investors in building the agenda and taking hands-on roles at the event.
- It gave our social investor representatives a taste of the work that telecentre.org supports with their investments
- Open, flexible agenda building as an approach was generally well received by all participants. However, there were a few people that felt confused by the process.
- Learning by doing is the best way to learn. The facilitation training of some leaders proved to be beneficial to the participants, and to the event, as it infused a generalized sense of ownership.
- Going the extra mile to break down the linguistic barriers was worth every effort. Hiring the professional team of translators had a very positive impact on the event as participants' feedback indicated a high degree of satisfaction in the way the linguistic aspect was handled.
- The documenting process for the event was delayed given that we had to change the original plan to have participants contribute to the live wiki occasioned by limited connectivity and computer access. The reality challenged our assumptions and reinforces the need for investments in programs like telecentre.org and ICTs for development in the region.

Participants are expected to continue discussions that started in Benin by shaping the ideas into concrete collaborative projects. telecentre.org will provide insight and mentoring in this process. The aim is to get as many telecentre practitioners, network leaders, researchers and social investors involved as a way of mobilising skills and resources. While telecentre.org does not guarantee to make social investments in each of the projects that will emerge from this process, efforts will be made to connect these with on-going programs or interest other social investors in the telecentre community to provide necessary. Priority will be given to project ideas with high potential for increasing the effectiveness of telecentre activities in the most collaborative and sustainable manner.

## **Acknowledgements and thanks**

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Evaluation forms asked participants to rate various aspects of the forum: objectives of the forum, most useful aspects, least useful, and suggestions for improvement. What follows is a summary of participants' responses.

On the other hand, nine percent of participants gave a "fair" rate to meeting the objectives, citing that they did not have enough time for individual discussions and/or unfamiliarity with open agenda formats.

***Least useful aspect of the forum:*** Very few participants (less than 9%) had entered comments on this section. Most of the comments were positive, indicating that there was nothing that participants did not find useful. However some participants found the following as least useful aspects of the forum: the visit to the market & museums (3 comments), long intro on day 1 (one comment), apparent lack of structure (open format), lengthy evening sessions, not enough reference materials to take home.

- **Venue:** there were complaints about the heat during the meetings/sessions. Some would have preferred to have air conditioning available to them. Also, some found the food selection too limited and room sharing too not suitable for everyone. Staying at the hotel, too far from main venue.
- **Logistics:** some raised problems with the lack of clarity about money issues (reimbursement, grants). Lack of money for basic needs (incidentals).
- **Connectivity:** Limited connectivity (hotel and Centre Songhai).
- **Format:** the format was too open for some, seems to lack structure. No opportunity to use PowerPoint.

Sessions/Rating	opening circle	spectrogram	speedgeek	break-out groups	peer assists	skills-share	project sprints	free time
Average rate	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2